

10–13 July 2024

# SAINT-SAËNS' ORGAN SYMPHONY

SYDNEY  
SYMPHONY  
ORCHESTRA

Principal Partner



# SYDNEY SYMPHONY ORCHESTRA

**PATRON** Her Excellency The Honourable Margaret Beazley AC KC

Founded in 1932 by the Australian Broadcasting Commission, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra has evolved into one of the world’s finest orchestras as Sydney has become one of the world’s great cities. Resident at the iconic Sydney Opera House, the Sydney Symphony Orchestra also performs in venues throughout Sydney and regional New South Wales, and international tours to Europe, Asia and the USA have earned the Orchestra worldwide recognition for artistic excellence.

The Orchestra’s first chief conductor was Sir Eugene Goossens, appointed in 1947; he was followed by Nicolai Malko, Dean Dixon, Moshe Atzmon, Willem van Otterloo, Louis Frémaux, Sir Charles Mackerras, Zdeněk Mácal, Stuart Challender, Edo de Waart and Gianluigi Gelmetti. Vladimir Ashkenazy was Principal Conductor from 2009 to 2013, followed by David Robertson as Chief Conductor from 2014 to 2019. Australian-born Simone Young commenced her role as Chief Conductor in 2022, a year in which the Orchestra made its return to a renewed Sydney Opera House Concert Hall. The Sydney Symphony Orchestra’s concerts encompass masterpieces from the classical repertoire, music by some of the finest living composers, and collaborations with guest artists from all genres, reflecting the Orchestra’s versatility and diverse appeal. Its award-winning education program is central to its commitment to the future of live symphonic music, and the Orchestra promotes the work of Australian composers through performances, recordings and its commissioning program.

## PERFORMING IN THIS CONCERT

### FIRST VIOLINS

**Harry Bennetts**  
*Associate Concertmaster*  
**Alexandra Osborne**  
*Associate Concertmaster*  
**Lerida Delbridge**  
*Assistant Concertmaster*  
**Fiona Ziegler**  
*Assistant Concertmaster*  
**Sun Yi**  
*Associate Concertmaster*  
*Emeritus*  
Jennifer Booth  
Sophie Cole  
Sercan Danis  
Georges Lentz  
Emily Long  
Alexandra Mitchell  
Léone Ziegler  
Robert Smith°  
Benjamin Tjoo°  
Natalia Harvey\*  
Ilya Isakovich\*

### SECOND VIOLINS

**Kirsty Hilton**  
*Principal*  
**Marina Marsden**  
*Principal*  
**Emma Jezek**  
*Acting Associate Principal*  
Victoria Bihun  
Emma Hayes  
Shuti Huang  
Monique Irik  
Wendy Kong  
Nicole Masters  
Maja Verunica  
Marcus Michelsen°  
Emily Qin°  
Amber Davis\*  
Marrianne Liu\*  
Veronique Serret\*

### VIOLAS

**Anne-Louise Comerford**  
*Associate Principal*  
**Justin Williams**  
*Assistant Principal*  
Sandro Costantino  
Rosemary Curtin  
Jane Hazelwood  
Stuart Johnson  
Leonid Volovelsky  
Andrew Jezek°  
Stephen Wright°  
Neil Thompson\*  
Meagan Turner\*  
James Wannan\*

### CELLOS

**Catherine Hewgill**  
*Principal*  
**Simon Cobcroft**  
*Associate Principal*  
**Leah Lynn**  
*Assistant Principal*  
Kristy Conrau  
Timothy Nankervis  
Christopher Pidcock  
Adrian Wallis  
Eliza Sdraulig°  
Paul Stender\*  
Andrew Hines\*

### DOUBLE BASSES

**Kees Boersma**  
*Principal*  
**Alex Henery**  
*Principal*  
David Campbell  
Dylan Holly  
Steven Larson  
Richard Lynn  
Jaen Pallandi  
Benjamin Ward

### FLUTES

**Joshua Batty**  
*Principal*  
Lily Bryant\*  
**Katlijn Sargeant\***  
*Guest Principal Piccolo*

### OBOES

**Diana Doherty**  
*Principal*  
Callum Hogan  
**Alexandre Oguey**  
*Principal Cor Anglais*

### CLARINETS

**Olli Leppäniemi\***  
*Guest Principal*  
Christopher Tingay  
**Alexander Morris**  
*Principal Bass Clarinet*

### BASSOONS

**Matthew Wilkie**  
*Principal Emeritus*  
Fiona McNamara  
**Noriko Shimada**  
*Principal Contrabassoon*

### HORNS

**Samuel Jacobs**  
*Principal*  
**Euan Harvey**  
*Acting Principal*  
Marnie Sebire  
Rachel Silver

### TRUMPETS

**David Elton**  
*Principal*  
Anthony Heinrichs  
Joel Walmsley†

### TROMBONES

**Scott Kinmont**  
*Acting Principal*  
Nick Byrne  
**Brett Page\***  
*Guest Principal*  
*Bass Trombone*

### TUBA

**Steve Rossé**  
*Principal*

### TIMPANI

**Antoine Siguré**  
*Principal*

### PERCUSSION

**Rebecca Lagos**  
*Principal*  
Timothy Constable

### KEYBOARDS / EXTRAS

**Kate Golla\***  
*Guest Principal Piano*  
**Catherine Davis\***  
*Piano*

**Bold** Principal  
\* Guest Musician  
° Contract Musician  
† Sydney Symphony Fellow



# 2024 CONCERT SEASON

## Emirates Masters Series

Wednesday 10 July, 8pm

Friday 12 July, 8pm

Saturday 13 July, 8pm

Concert Hall,  
Sydney Opera House

## Emirates Thursday Afternoon Symphony

Thursday 11 July, 1.30pm

# SAINT-SAËNS' ORGAN SYMPHONY THUNDEROUS AND TENDER

**STÉPHANE DENÈVE** conductor

**OLIVIER LATRY** organ

**GUILLAUME CONNESSON** (born 1970)

*Flammenschrift* (2012)

Australian premiere

**FRANCIS POULENC** (1899–1963)

**Concerto in G minor for organ, strings and timpani** (1938)

Andante – Allegro giocoso – subito Andante moderato – Allegro  
(Molto agitato) – Très calme (Lent) – Tempo de l'Allegro initial –  
Tempo Introduction (Largo)

INTERVAL

**CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS** (1835–1921)

**Symphony No.3 in C minor, Op.78 ('Organ' Symphony) (1886)**

i. Adagio – Allegro moderato – Poco adagio

ii. Allegro moderato – Presto – Maestoso – Allegro

## Pre-concert talk

By Genevieve Lang in the  
Northern Foyer at 7.15pm  
(12.45 Thursday)

## Estimated durations

Connesson – 12 minutes

Poulenc – 25 minutes

Interval – 20 Minutes

Saint-Saëns – 38 minutes

The concert will run for  
approximately 1 hour  
and 40 minutes

## Cover image

By Craig Abercrombie

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Principal Partner



# WELCOME

Welcome to **Saint-Saëns' Organ Symphony**, a concert in which we are set to experience the Sydney Opera House Grand Organ in its full glory.

Emirates and the Sydney Symphony Orchestra have enjoyed one of the longest-standing and most significant relationships in Australia's performing arts, one of which we remain extremely proud.

We're passionate about growing music, arts, and culture to enrich the lives of the communities we serve and connecting the finest talents with audiences globally.

Not often played, the Sydney Opera House Grand Organ is the world's largest mechanical tracker-action pipe organ, consisting of 10,244 pipes. This magnificent instrument could not be in better hands, as virtuoso French organist Olivier Latry performs Saint-Saëns' Symphony No.3 and Poulenc's Organ Concerto, quintessential works of the French Romantic period.

Conductor Stéphane Denève elicits all the colour, power and drama of one of Saint-Saëns most loved and famous works, as well as the ethereal and contrasting music of Poulenc and Guillaume Connesson, currently one of the most widely performed French composers around the world.

As the Presenter of this Masters Series, Emirates is a strong supporter of superlative local and international talent, in particular the Sydney Symphony Orchestra's Chief Conductor Simone Young AM.

Our partnership with the Sydney Symphony Orchestra is a cornerstone of our ongoing support of music and arts around the world and reflects our long-standing commitment to Australia.

The exhilarating and flowing music you will experience in this performance embodies the highest levels of originality, collaboration and excellence, qualities and values the Sydney Symphony Orchestra and Emirates both aspire to.

We are delighted by our continuing partnership, and I hope you enjoy this wonderful concert.



**Barry Brown**  
**Divisional Vice President for Australasia**  
**Emirates**



# YOUR CONCERT AT A GLANCE

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## GUILLAUME CONNESSON (born 1970)

*Flammenschrift* (2012) - Australian premiere

*Flammenschrift* is a single-movement work of about nine minutes' duration, with a driving rhythmic energy that reflects the composer's image of the angry misanthropic Beethoven, whose genius nonetheless shines through his rage. Listen out for references to well-known Beethoven works, as well as some by other German composers.

It dates from 2012, the year that despite the Mayan calendar, the world didn't end; Voyager 1 exited the solar system; Queen Elizabeth II celebrated her diamond jubilee; Barack Obama was re-elected president of the USA. New music included symphonies by Peter Maxwell Davies and Philip Glass.



Guillaume Connesson  
Photo by Christophe Peus.

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## FRANCIS POULENC (1899–1963)

Concerto in G minor for organ, strings and timpani (1938)

Though played in one continuous span, this concerto falls into several clearly-contrasting movements, and makes obvious nods to a variety of earlier composers' works. Poulenc's score notes the help in devising the registration of sounds provided by another giant of French organ music, Maurice Duruflé, who was soloist at the premiere.

Composed in 1938, the year of Hitler's invasion of Czechoslovakia; the release of Disney's *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*; the patenting of the ball-point pen by László Bíró; the inauguration of Douglas Hyde as first President of the Republic of Ireland.

Other new music included Roy Harris' Third Symphony, Korngold's score for *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, Carl Orff's *Carmina Burana*.



Francis Poulenc

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## CAMILLE SAINT-SAËNS (1835–1921)

Symphony No.3 in C minor, Op.78 ('Organ' Symphony) (1886)

The symphony is in two movements, each of which is divided in two, with the organ featured in the second section of each. The orchestra is further augmented by two pianos.

The 'Organ Symphony' premiered in 1886, the year that saw the death of Ludwig II of Bavaria, the first show at the Folies bergère in Paris, Karl Benz patenting the first petrol-driven motor car. In the arts, Robert Louis Stevenson's *The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* appeared, as did important paintings by Edgar Degas and Paul Cézanne, and Georges Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte*. New music included César Franck's Violin Sonata and chamber works by Brahms.



1884 portrait of Camille Saint-Saëns  
by Gustave Boulanger.

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

## **STÉPHANE DENÈVE** conductor

Stéphane Denève is Music Director of the St. Louis Symphony Orchestra, Artistic Director of the New World Symphony and Principal Guest Conductor of the Netherlands Radio Philharmonic. He previously served as Principal Guest Conductor of The Philadelphia Orchestra, Chief Conductor of the Brussels Philharmonic, Chief Conductor of Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra (SWR) and Music Director of the Royal Scottish National Orchestra.

Recognised internationally for the exceptional quality of his performances and programming, Stéphane Denève regularly appears at major concert venues with the world's greatest orchestras and soloists. He has a special affinity for the music of his native France and is a passionate advocate for music of the 21st century.

In North America, Stéphane Denève made his Carnegie Hall debut with the Boston Symphony Orchestra, with whom he has appeared several times both in Boston and at Tanglewood, and he regularly conducts the New York Philharmonic, The Philadelphia Orchestra, The Cleveland Orchestra, Los Angeles Philharmonic, San Francisco Symphony, New World Symphony, and Toronto Symphony.

As a recording artist, Denève has won critical acclaim for his recordings of the works of Poulenc, Debussy, Ravel, Roussel, Franck and Connesson. He is a triple winner of the Diapason d'Or of the Year, has been shortlisted for *Gramophone's* Artist of the Year Award, and has won the prize for symphonic music at the International Classical Music Awards. His most recent releases include a live recording of Honegger's *Jeanne d'arc au bûcher* with the Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, and two discs of the works of Guillaume Connesson with the Brussels Philharmonic (the first of which was awarded the Diapason d'Or de l'année, Caecilia Award, and *Classica Magazine's*

CHOC of the Year). A box set of his complete Ravel recordings with Stuttgart Radio Symphony Orchestra was released in 2022 by Hänssler Classic.

A graduate and prize-winner of the Paris Conservatoire, Stéphane Denève worked closely in his early career with Sir Georg Solti, Georges Prêtre and Seiji Ozawa. A gifted communicator and educator, he is committed to inspiring the next generation of musicians and listeners, and has worked regularly with young people in programmes such as those of the New World Symphony, Tanglewood Music Center, the Colburn School, the European Union Youth Orchestra, and the Music Academy of the West.



Stéphane Denève

# ABOUT THE ARTISTS

## OLIVIER LATRY organ

Established as the leading worldwide ambassador for his instrument, French organist Olivier Latry has performed in the world's most prestigious venues, been the guest of leading orchestras under renowned conductors, recorded for major labels and premiered an impressive number of works. Named titular organist at Notre-Dame in Paris at the age of 23 and organist Emeritus at the Orchestre National de Montréal since 2012, Olivier Latry is first and foremost an accomplished, thoughtful and adventurous musician, exploring all possible fields of the organ music, with an exceptional talent as an improviser.

Recent highlights include the Belgian, French and North American premieres of Pascal Dusapin's *Waves*; Kaija Saariaho's *Maan Varjot* Montréal, Orchestre National de Lyon and Philharmonia Orchestra in 2014, and Michael Gandolfi's concerto with the Boston Symphony Orchestra in 2015. He also premiered Benoît Mernier's organ concerto for the inauguration of Brussels' BOZAR new organ in 2017. In 2019, he played the German premiere of Thierry Escaich's Third Organ Concerto, with the Dresden Philharmoniker and Stéphane Denève.

His strong attachment to the French organ repertoire led him to record Olivier Messiaen's complete works for organ for Deutsche Grammophon which he also performed in recitals in Paris, London and New York.

In 2005, he also recorded a César Franck album for Deutsche Grammophon. Among several other recordings, Olivier also recorded Saint-Saëns' Symphony No.3 with Christoph Eschenbach and the Philadelphia Orchestra for Ondine. In 2013, he released *Trois Siècles d'Orgue à Notre-Dame de Paris* on the Naïve label, which features music composed by past and current organists of Notre-Dame Cathedral. In 2016 he recorded for Warner Music at the Philharmonie de Paris' Rieger organ. In March 2019, he

started a collaboration with La Dolce Volta label with an album called *Bach to the Future*. Recorded on the celebrated organ of Notre Dame, the album features Bach's transcriptions and original works specially adapted to this extraordinary instrument. His latest latest album on La Dolce Volta is called *Liszt Inspirations*. Recorded on the organ of the Philharmonie de Paris, it was released in May 2021.

A former student of Gaston Litaize, Olivier Latry now teaches at the Conservatoire National Supérieur de Paris, and is a recipient of numerous international distinctions and awards worldwide, including the Prix de la Fondation Cino et Simone Del Duca (Institut de France–Académie des Beaux-Arts) in 2000, and "Honoris Causa" Fellowships from the North and Midlands School of Music (UK) in 2006, and from the Royal College of Organists (UK) in 2007. He was also named International Performer of the Year by the American Guild of Organists in April 2009, and received an honorary Doctor of Music degree from McGill University in Montreal Canada in 2010.

From 2019 to 2024, Olivier is William T. Kemper Artist-in-Residence at the University of Kansas at Lawrence, Ks.



Olivier Latry

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

On YouTube there is a clip in which the late, great French composer and organist Olivier Messiaen improvises on a plainsong, *Puer natus est* (a boy was born), which has been sung for centuries at Christmas-time. But there is no saccharine ‘O-Little-Town-of-Bethlehem’ flavour to this music, nothing that suggests a silent night with the Holy Family surrounded by shepherds, magi and surprisingly continent livestock. The boy in this case – Jesus – is no less than the incarnate Lord of Creation, and Messiaen’s powerful, vertiginous, highly coloured and energetic treatment of the tune leaves us in no doubt of that fact, or the awe that it inspires in him.

This clip is an important document of French organ music: it reminds us how intimately organ music and liturgy are related; it carries on what the great 19th-century educator Louis Niedermeyer described as ‘submitting modern harmony to the form of the ancient modes’; it takes great delight in the sheer variety of colour and overwhelming sound of which the instrument was capable from the 19th century on; and it shows the importance attached to the skill of improvisation. (After all, one can never tell for sure just how long it’s going to take for a procession to move from the western door to the altar.)

## DIVERSION – THE MECHANICS

As early as the 17th century, French organ music had a distinct character, which – to oversimplify slightly – showed less interest in formal processes (such as counterpoint) than did the music of contemporary German-speaking composers, but rather with more of a stress on instrumental colour. A number of generic titles of works of the time simply describe their timbre.

Like any aerophone (wind instrument) the organ requires pressurised air fed into a resonating chamber, in this case, a pipe, where its vibrations create sound. The organ requires a pipe for each individual note; variety of sound depends on each pipe’s material (metal, wood, glass); its shape (cylindrical, square, triangular); on whether the pipe is open or stopped, straight or bent; whether it acts like a large recorder, or contains a beating metal reed like a clarinet; whether it is mounted vertically or horizontally.

Pipes of like kind are grouped together in ranks, which are activated by the stops near the keyboard, or keyboards (manuals). Depending on the size of the instrument there can be several manuals, each activating different ranks of pipes (about like the different sections of the orchestra), and many organs also have a pedal board played, naturally, by the feet. Pipes described as ‘8-foot’ play the pitches as written; to these can be added ranks of higher pipes (4-foot pipes produce an octave above, and much higher-pitched ranks add brightness to the sound). Pedals, of course add much lower ranks – 16-foot pipes, for instance play an octave lower than written, and the famous 64-foot stop on the Sydney Town Hall organ means the instrument can shake the building to its foundations.

While there were numerous ingenious methods of supplying air to the pipes dating back to antiquity, the fact remains that for much of the organ’s history the air



# ABOUT THE MUSIC

had to be supplied manually, by people pumping bellows behind the scenes. Some larger pre-industrial organs had four or five bellows, but in the main the instrument was restricted in size. This of course worked supremely well in the Baroque period, especially in the German-speaking lands, where the crisp clarity of smaller machines gave rise to the intricate polyphonic works of JS Bach to name but one. And a further virtue from necessity was that some small instruments, looking rather like cigarette machines, were quite easily portable.

## THE NINETEENTH CENTURY AND BEYOND

In France, after the disruptions of the Revolution and the Napoleonic period, the early to mid-19th century saw a revival of interest in church music and architecture. Composers of the 19th century looked back to the Baroque, but, often through the prism of a typically French fascination with instrumental colour, aided by the huge strides in instrument-building technology that made much larger instruments, new sounds, and newly imagined volumes of sounds, possible. Among the greatest organ builders of the age was Aristide Cavaillé-Coll (1811-1899).



Organ builder Aristide Cavaillé-Coll c.1894.  
Heliography by Dujardin.

Cavaillé-Coll's instruments included those of the vast churches of Saint-Sulpice and Notre Dame in Paris. His innovations, influenced by and influencing British organ-building in particular, include configuring the console so that the whole organ could be activated from a single manual or keyboard, developing the English idea of the swell box, whereby shutters can open or shut to create a real crescendo and diminuendo, and refining the mechanism whereby a player can 'store' different combinations of stops and recall them at the touch of button, rather than requiring extravagant choreography and/or a team of assistants. This new flexibility in manipulating volume, mass and colour led inevitably to the creation of the behemoths that inhabit the town halls of Sydney and Melbourne. More immediately it brought forth a body of new work by French composers such as Alexandre Guilmant and Charles Tournemire, and the genuinely symphonic works for the instrument of Charles-Marie Widor and Louis Vierne. The 20th and 21st centuries have seen the magisterial works of Marcel Dupré, Messiaen, Jehan Alain, Maurice Duruflé (who premiered Poulenc's concerto) and Naji Hakim.

The idea of a symphonic work for organ naturally meant a reengagement with the largely Austro-German symphonic tradition, which 19th-century composers such as César Franck had cultivated. This in turn lies behind the use of organ and orchestra for a symphonic work, as we hear in Saint-Saëns' masterpiece; the occasionally ironic manner of the Poulenc Concerto. In our own time, Guillaume Connesson's *Flammenschrift* (though omitting organ) is a homage to Beethoven and more broadly to the German symphonic tradition.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## WRITTEN IN FLAME – CONNESSON'S HOMAGE TO BEETHOVEN

Connesson, born in 1970, is currently one of the world's most widely-performed French composers. Commissions for orchestras such as Royal Concertgebouw Orchestra, Philadelphia Orchestra, Orchestre National de France are at the origin of most of his works including *Pour sortir au jour*, commissioned by the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (2013) and *Les Trois Cités de Lovecraft* (co-commission of the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra and the Orchestre National de Lyon).

He won a Victoire de la Musique award in 2015 and 2019 as well as Sacem's Grand Prize in 2012. His discography includes, amongst others, two discs of chamber music and three of his symphonic work. The first, *Lucifer*, and the third, *Lost Horizon*, obtained a 'Choc' from *Classica* magazine, and the second, *Pour sortir au jour*, numerous critical distinctions such as the 'Diapason d'Or del'Année' as well the *Classica* 'Choc de l'Année'.

After studies at the Conservatoire National de Région in Boulogne-Billancourt (his birthplace) and the Paris Conservatoire, he obtained first prizes in choral direction, history of music, analysis, electro-acoustic and orchestration.



Guillaume Connesson  
Photo by Christophe Peus.

He has been professor of orchestration at the Aubervilliers-La Courneuve Conservatory since 1997. From 2016 to 2018, he was in residence with the Netherlands Philharmonic Orchestra as well as with the Orchestre National de Lyon. From 2019 to 2021, he was in residence with the Orchestre National d'Ile-de-France.

*Flammenschrift* (meaning something like 'written in flames') had its premiere in 2012 with l'Orchestre national de France under Daniele Gatti.

Connesson has written that:

I wanted to compose an angry work that would paint a psychological portrait of Beethoven and, in a broader sense, to pay tribute to German music. I paint a picture of Beethoven as an angry, seething, impetuous man whose inner violence shines through in many aspects of his music. This misanthropic Beethoven, who can be seen walking through the streets unkempt and wearing a shapeless hat, this loner cursed by fate but sanctified by genius, has always fascinated me. To honour him, I use a rhythmic style of writing that contains numerous allusions to his works. In a broader sense, I wanted to pay tribute to all of German music by referring to certain compositions of Johannes Brahms and Richard Strauss at the end of the piece.

*Flammenschrift* is scored for two flutes, piccolo, two oboes, two clarinets, two bassoons and contrabassoon; pairs of horns, trumpets and trombones; timpani and strings.

It was premiered at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées in Paris on 8 November 2012, with the Orchestre National de France conducted by Daniele Gatti.

This is the work's Australian premiere.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## POULENC, THE CONCERTO, AND THE GERMAN TRADITION

‘Forget Haendel...’ This was Poulenc’s advice to the American organist, E. Power Biggs, on interpreting his Concerto for organ. Poulenc might easily have added ‘Forget Poulenc,’ for in many ways the concerto undermined the popular perception of the French composer – the ‘charming Monsieur Poulenc’.

Poulenc’s other concertos exemplify the ease, facility and bright charm of Poulenc’s music. They are in turn happy, serene, spirited and sentimental; occasionally mocking and inevitably witty; and, although sometimes pushing the boundaries of good taste, presenting no difficulties to the listener. The Concerto in G minor for organ, strings and timpani stands apart. Poulenc described it as ‘a serious and austere concerto’, and said: ‘If one wishes to have an exact idea of the serious side of my music, one must look here, as well as in my religious works.’

Poulenc was a complex individual: a man of deep emotions and faith, but also fashionable, engaging and sociable. His privileged background and genial nature gave him access to influential private salons and vital commissions, and one of the ‘princesses useful to my career’, as Poulenc described his patron-friends, was Winnaretta Singer, heiress to the sewing machine fortune and, through her second marriage, the Princesse Edmond de Polignac. An accomplished pianist and organist herself, she was a remarkable patron and boasted a ‘collection’ of many important commissions, including works by Stravinsky and Falla.



Francis Poulenc

Poulenc ‘engineered’ his first commission from the Princesse through an intermediary – a ploy that resulted in the Concerto for two pianos (1932). Two years later he approached her directly, proposing a work for organ, and a second commission was promptly offered: a concerto to feature the Cavaillé-Coll organ installed in her Paris residence.

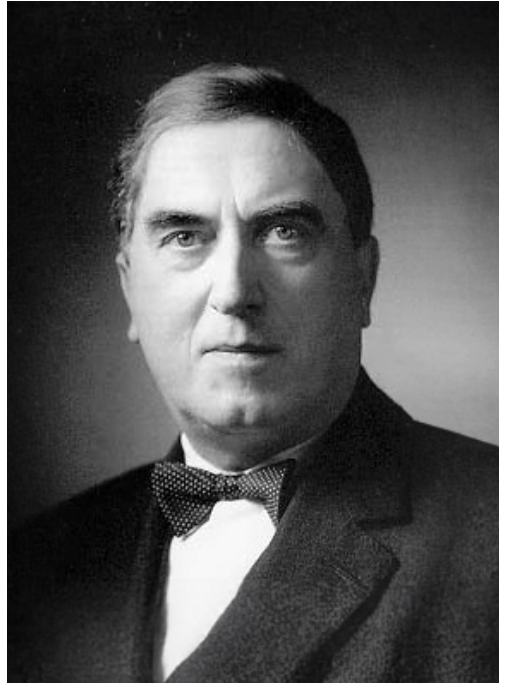
The concerto was ‘almost completed’ in April 1936, when Poulenc confessed to the Princesse’s niece, ‘It is not the amusing Poulenc of the Concerto for two pianos but more like a Poulenc en route for the cloister...’ The description was prophetic: in a few months Poulenc was indeed ‘en route for the cloister’ – the violent death of a friend in a car accident led him to contemplate the ‘frailty of the human condition’ and he was ‘once again attracted to the spiritual life’. The *Litanies à la Vierge Noire* (Litanies to the Black Virgin) stemmed directly from the experience, and the emotional depth and austere simplicity of this music surely spilled over into the concerto-in-progress.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

Until its completion in 1938, the concerto cost Poulenc ‘a great many tears’. He writes of constructing the music from ‘new materials’, of retrieving ‘botched’ sections, and finally: ‘Never...have I had so much trouble finding my means of expression, but nevertheless hope that it now flows freely *without giving the impression of too much effort*.’ Even at his most serious, Poulenc sought to mask the effort and discipline that underpinned his music.

So, if we are to ignore the effort, if we are to forget the ‘amusing Poulenc of the Concerto for two pianos’, and if we are to ‘forget Haendel’ – who are we to remember?

Bach, perhaps. The opening bars of the Concerto bear an uncanny resemblance to Bach’s Fantasia in G minor (BWV542) – which Poulenc had wanted played at his own funeral – although the punctuating dissonance of the added-note chords is entirely 1930s Poulenc. Moving still further back in the lineage of great organists, Buxtehude is evoked in the structure of the music. Departing from his customary short-winded forms, Poulenc embarks on a fantasia or toccata – a single movement divided into seven contrasting but organically connected sections, and demonstrating, in the spirit of its Baroque ancestors, the musical and expressive possibilities of the instrument.



Composer and organist Maurice Duruflé, who premiered Poulenc's concerto.

Poulenc could hardly have chosen two worthier models in his first essay in writing for the organ. Just as he had evoked the French *clavecinistes* in his breezy *Concert champêtre* for harpsichord, Poulenc drew on the textures and melodic gestures of the baroque organ. These are enhanced by modest ‘neoclassical’ forces – an orchestra of strings and timpani that makes performance in a church possible, although it is not a ‘concerto da chiesa’.

But despite the references to the past (perhaps because of them) the concerto is very much of its time, from the inadvertent reference to the harmonies of Fauré, which follows almost immediately the ‘Bach’ opening, to Poulenc’s dissonances – not the playful and irreverent ‘wrong notes’ of his lighter music, but powerful and pensive. And Poulenc was not blind to the capabilities



# ABOUT THE MUSIC

of the modern French instrument, with its massive sonorities, sensual lyricism and unprecedented flexibility. In fact, his advice to Biggs continued: ‘play very much in the French style, pompous, gay, and pungent...’

Poulenc’s final words of advice draw attention to the contrasts of this concerto – the ‘extreme violence’ of the big chords, the rhythmic and ‘sprightly’ character of the *Allegro* sections, the ‘serene and poetic conclusion’. These clear shifts in tempo and mood are the listener’s landmarks in navigating the compelling architecture of the concerto.

At the heart of the music is the *Andante moderato*, with its extended dialogue between organ and strings, supported by an incessant timpani pulse and concluding with an ominous march in the basses that hints at the final, harrowing scene of *Dialogues of the Carmelites*. And as the concerto draws to a close, Poulenc reveals the reflective side of his personality, suspending a chantlike melody in gossamer orchestral textures over oscillating harmonies and sustained pedal notes from the organ. Fittingly, this instrumental prayer is framed by Poulenc’s opening gesture to Bach, that most devout of composers.

As more than one writer has observed, the Concerto for Organ presents Poulenc at his most complex – not a religious work, yet tinged with devotion and austerity, not the amusing Monsieur Poulenc, yet suffused with elegance and sentiment. ‘The sacred and the secular interact here,’ wrote one critic shortly before Poulenc’s death, ‘forming an alliance that corresponds to Poulenc’s innermost nature.’ Forget Handel, forget the Poulenc of popular perception. This is the real thing.

Poulenc’s Organ Concerto is scored for timpani, strings and organ.

The first performance was on 16 December 1938 at the private salon of the commissioner, Princess Edmond de Polignac, with Maurice Duruflé as soloist and Nadia Boulanger conducting; the first public performance was in June 1939 at the Salle Gaveau concert hall in Paris, with Duruflé the soloist conducted by Roger Désormière.

The Sydney Symphony Orchestra first performed this work in 1956, with Fernando Germani as soloist and Joseph Post conducting. Notable performances include Marie-Claire Alain conducted by Leif Segerstam (1979); Michael Dudman conducted by Louis Frémaux (1980); Gillian Weir conducted by Werner Andreas Albert (1988); Simon Preston conducted by Jansug Kakhidze (1993) and Olivier Latry conducted by Edo de Waart (2002).

Our most recent performance was in 2014, with David Drury as soloist conducted by Jonathan Nott.

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

## SAINT-SAËNS – THE FRENCH BEETHOVEN?

Saint-Saëns trained as a church musician. He began his studies at the Paris Conservatoire in 1848, so by the late 1860s was in the period of his early maturity as an artist. From 1857 he had been organist at the church of the Madeleine; in 1861 he took up a teaching position at the Ecole Niedermeyer.

As we have noted, Niedermeyer, the school's founder, was determined to train musicians who were able to build on the long traditions of Catholic church music; he had written a treatise on how 'modern harmony is submitted to the form of the ancient modes'.



1884 portrait of Camille Saint-Saëns by Gustave Boulanger.

In 1887 Charles Gounod heard the Parisian premiere of Saint-Saëns' Symphony No.3 and famously gushed, 'there goes the French Beethoven'. Hyperbole, of course, but the work has remained hugely popular ever since. The reasons for its continued currency are easy to find: Saint-Saëns believed that 'the time has come for the symphony

to benefit by the progress of modern instrumentation' and his orchestration is masterly, with a dramatic range of sounds from the diaphanous to the massive. The 'Organ' Symphony is, moreover, replete with memorable tunes and intricate counterpoint, traversing an emotional landscape from deepest melancholy to sheer joy.

It was commissioned and first performed under the composer's baton by the London Philharmonic Society in 1886 at St James' Hall, which had a 'large organ by Gray and Davidson'. During the composition Saint-Saëns' old friend Liszt visited him and admired the score; sadly, Liszt died weeks before the premiere, inspiring Saint-Saëns to dedicate the symphony to his memory. Liszt had been a great mentor ever since 1857 when, hearing Saint-Saëns improvising at the organ of the Madeleine church, he had declared the young Frenchman to be 'the finest organist in the world'. Saint-Saëns for his part fought for the due recognition of the older man as composer as well as pianist, leading Debussy grudgingly to admit: 'we are indebted to him for having recognized the tumultuous genius of Liszt, and we should remember that he professed admiration for old Bach at a time when such an act of faith was also an act of courage.'

Perhaps, though, there is more than just hyperbole to the Beethoven comparison. Like many a symphony of Beethoven's, especially the Fifth, the 'Organ' Symphony begins in darkness and turbulence and only toward the end does it reach the bright affirmation of C major. And like Beethoven in the Fifth, Saint-Saëns is remarkably economical with his thematic material: it is possible to trace almost all those melodies back to the motifs heard in the work's introduction and the opening of the following Allegro moderato. How the composer elaborates these into such

# ABOUT THE MUSIC

a contrasting abundance of melodies is by the principle of thematic transformation developed by Liszt.

In his program note for the first performance, Saint-Saëns wrote that ‘this symphony is divided into two parts. Nevertheless, it embraces in principle the four traditional movements, but the first is altered in its development to serve as the introduction to the *Poco adagio*, and the scherzo is connected by the same process to the finale.’ In other words, the four movements are grouped in pairs, with the main dramatic weight carried by the second of each.

The opening *Adagio* is deliberately vague in direction, containing almost inconsequential motifs that, as we have noted, become transformed in the course of the work. The static nature of the introduction enhances the release of energy in the *Allegro moderato* whose febrile theme begins with the same notes as the plainchant for the *Dies irae*. Saint-Saëns had, after all, been trained as a church musician and taught at the Ecole Niedermeyer, a school whose founder was an authority on how ‘modern harmony is submitted to the form of the ancient modes’. This fast music, however, seems to peter out, subsiding into the beautifully sombre and emotionally searching *Poco adagio*. It is here that the organ makes an appearance, providing a velvet backdrop for the questing second theme of the movement.

Part II opens with a turbulent scherzo punctuated by timpani. It too builds in sound and fury but mysteriously winds down to a quiet, simple texture built on another chant-like motif. Only now does Saint-Saëns unleash the full power of the organ. A shattering C-major chord opens onto a world of sparkling piano figurations, chorale melodies and an overpoweringly joyful final peroration.

Saint-Saëns’s ‘Organ’ Symphony is scored for a large orchestra: three flutes (the third doubling piccolo), two oboes, cor anglais, two clarinets, bass clarinet, two bassoons and contrabassoon; four horns, three trumpets, three trombones and tuba; timpani, percussion, pianoforte four-hands, strings and organ soloist.

It was premiered on 19 May, 1886 at St James's Hall, London, with Saint-Saëns doubling as soloist and conducting the Philharmonic Society Orchestra.

The Sydney Symphony first performed the work in 1948, with Margery Horn as soloist conducted by the Orchestra’s first Chief Conductor Eugene Goossens. It was a favourite of our former Chief Conductor Louis Frémaux, who conducted the work several times including with Michael Dudman in 1981. Our most recent performance was at Sydney Town Hall in 2021, with Dane Lam conducting David Drury as soloist.

**Notes by Guillaume Connesson © 2012,  
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**Scoring and history by Hugh Robertson**

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Olivier Latry. Photo by Henry Buffetau.

# THE KING OF THE KING OF INSTRUMENTS

**A teacher at the Paris Conservatoire and one of the titled organists at Notre-Dame de Paris, Olivier Latry is one of the world's most celebrated organists. Ahead of his return to Sydney, we discuss his place in the rich tradition of French organ music and the unique instrument at the Sydney Opera House.**

The organ is a remarkable instrument. Or, rather, organs are remarkable instruments; unlike most instruments which are fundamentally the same around the world, each individual organ is its own beast, shaped by a whole host of variables from its size, shape, action, mechanics, materials – and, especially in the case of the Sydney Opera House organ, by the very building in which it is housed.

Organs are also wildly different from country to country, even when those countries are neighbours: France and Germany each has a rich organ tradition, but those instruments can be a world apart even when only a few miles from each other.

Perhaps nobody embodies the French tradition like Olivier Latry. One of the titled organists at Notre Dame cathedral since 1985, teacher at the Paris Conservatoire, in both roles Latry is part of a long line that reads like a *Who's Who* of French music: Gounod, Massenet, Messiaen, Fauré, Farrenc and Franck, to name but a few.

‘That’s true that we have this relationship with the organ, especially because the organ had always a very important part in liturgy [Religious service] in the 17th and 18th century,’ says Latry from his home in Brittany, the region of northwest France that juts out into the Atlantic.

‘Then in the 19th century when the organ became more a secular instrument, many of the composers of that time started to compose pieces which were just made for the concert and not for the church anymore. So we had both directions, which helped to enlarge the repertoire of the organ – and made it very famous of course.’

One of the most famous French composers, and one synonymous with organ music, is Camille Saint-Saëns. A musical prodigy, he gave his first public performance at ten, then after studying at the Paris Conservatoire became a church organist, rising rapidly to the post of organist at La Madeleine in Paris, the official church of the French Empire – it was there that Franz Liszt heard him play and declared him the greatest organist in the world.

Saint-Saëns wrote his Third Symphony – ‘with organ’ – many years later, in the 1880s, by which point he was generally regarded as France’s greatest-living composer. It was the last symphony he wrote, and some see it as an autobiographical work looking back over his own life. He himself said, shortly after its premiere, ‘I gave everything to it I was able to give. What I have here accomplished, I will never achieve again.’

It is a stunning piece of music, full of beautiful passages that allow the (unusually large) orchestra its chance to shine without the organ. Then when the organ comes in for the finale, it crashes in with enormous chords that can shake the very foundations of the concert hall.

‘Saint-Saëns really knew what to do to make the organ sound good with the orchestra,’ says Latry with a smile.

‘At first the organ is just the accompaniment of the strings – just to support the orchestra...Then in the last movement, this is all about the power of the organ.’

(Funnily enough, despite the enormous sound of this symphony, it is best-known in Australia thanks to a very small pig. When writing the score for the film *Babe*, composer Nigel Westlake used the theme from the finale for the song Farmer Hoggett sings to his porcine companion, ‘If I Had Words.’)

Latry feels very keenly his connection to Saint-Saëns, and indeed to the whole French tradition. Among his many other roles – international soloist, recording artist, published author – he has been, since 1985, one of the titled organists at Notre-Dame de Paris, as well as a teacher at the Paris Conservatoire – both great bastions of French organ music.

‘I remember the first mass that I played there as an organist,’ recalls Latry.

‘I still remember putting my hands on the first chord, and thinking, “so many people played that organ before me in that space.” You have this weight which is just horrible on your shoulders.’

‘And speaking about Saint-Saëns and the French tradition...all the French organists went to the Paris Conservatoire. When I was 18, my teacher Gaston Litaize was speaking about Louis Vierne as his father, because [Litaize] was a student of Vierne. And then going further, he said “César Franck was my grandfather.” And then I was 18 and I was thinking to myself, “well, Louis Vierne was my grandfather and I am the great-grandson to César Franck.”’

‘Being a teacher at the Conservatoire for 30 years, we have this link. And we have to give to the people this tradition which goes in several ways. It’s not only playing in the way they played 30, 50 or 100 years ago – it’s also speaking about all the stories that you will never find in any book. And those stories are very important to understand the French spirit.’

‘I remember many organists that I met when I was 20 who were 80,’ continues Latry, ‘which means that they were 20 during the 1930s – so they have met Ravel, they have met Florent Schmitt, Widor, Vierne, Honegger. It was quite something

for me to speak with those people and having the link like this. This is something I remember: This link can exist in many ways, but having this first testimony of music history is very, very important.'

This inheritance is especially front of mind for Latry at the moment: as we speak, he is in his final days of teaching at the Paris Conservatoire.

'This last year I really organised my teaching to not only to teach people how to play the organ, but also to speak about the stories. I was very close to Olivier Messiaen, and speaking with the students about Messiaen I was exactly in the same situation that I was when Gaston Litaize spoke about Vierne to me. And I hope that in 40 years they will speak to their students about this relation that I had with Messiaen – I think it's very important to have this consideration.'

For now, though, Latry's focus is on Sydney, and his first performances with the Orchestra since 2015. He has very fond memories of the Orchestra, the Sydney Opera House and of the organ, and is looking forward to experiencing the new sound of the revitalised Concert Hall.

But, as always, a big part of his rehearsal will simply be getting to know the instrument again after all these years.

'It will take me first maybe two hours to go just through the organ, through each part,' he says matter-of-factly. 'It's a little bit like if I was a conductor and I would have to shake hands of all the people in the orchestra just to know their character, their personality – and then when I know them a little bit better, then I'm able to make music with them.'

'It's exactly the same thing for an organ. So I need to listen to all stops alone, and then to listen how they will combine together until I get to the point where I say well this is the registration that I want. So that takes time.'

'Each time you have to see and to find the way – what is the best sound for that musical moment, what is the best sound for the atmosphere of that moment, what is the best sound for the balance with the orchestra. It's really some kind of acrobatic situation each time.'

How exciting for Sydney to get to watch this high-wire act once more, high above the Concert Hall stage.



Olivier Latry outside Notre-Dame Cathedral.

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# MUSICIAN PROFILE



## WENDY KONG

Violin

**How long have you been playing with the Sydney Symphony?**

Since 2016.

**What has been the highlight of your Sydney Symphony career so far?**

Even though it was so long ago, I still remember the week we performed with Nobuyuki Tsuji in 2016. It was just incredible and so inspirational. I am also a huge fan of Augustin Hadelich, last time when he played his encore, *Por Una Cabeza*, I just sat there in awe (open-mouthed and everything).

**Who is your favourite composer to perform or to listen to?**

One favourite would have to be Mendelssohn, his music is always fun and enjoyable to perform or listen. At one point my Instagram handle was 'Wendelssohn'! 😂😭

**Do you have any pre-concert rituals or superstitions?**

Yes – never wear hair tie on left hand.

**If you didn't play your instrument, what instrument would you like to play – and why?**

Probably the Viola. I have grown to love the sonority of viola, especially the lower register.

**What do you like to do with your spare time when you aren't playing or practicing?**

Binge-watching dramas or horrors – and knitting! 🧶

**What was the last book/podcast/TV series you really loved?**

*Single's Inferno*, a Korean reality show on Netflix. (Sorry, I wish I had something more sophisticated to offer!)

**What is the best piece of advice you ever received – either musical or general?**

'It's ok to make a mistake.'

**What is your idea of a perfect day?**

Any day not waking up to an alarm is a good day.

# THANK YOU

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